

Message Text

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ACTION ACDA-12

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SUBJECT: INDIA AND NUCLEAR SAFEGUARDS

REF: NEW DELHI 0223

1. DURING A HALF HOUR VISIT WITH PRIME MINISTER DESAI YES-
TERDAY AFTERNOON, THE CODEL OF FIVE SENATORS ACCOMPANIED BY
THE AMBASSADOR HAD A FRANK AND FAIRLY EXTENSIVE DISCUSSION
WITH HIM ON NON-PROLIFERATION ISSUES. SENATORS HOLLINGS AND
RIBICOFF TOOK THE LEAD ON THE AMERICAN SIDE AND EXPRESSED OUR
CONCERNS AND THE REASONS FOR THE US POSITIONS VERY EFFECTIVELY.

2. THE PRIME MINISTER MAINTAINED THROUGHOUT (A) THE IMPRO-
PRIETY OF THE NUCLEAR-WEAPONS STATES SEEKING TO IMPOSE LIMITS
ON OTHER COUNTRIES THAT THEY THEMSELVES DO NOT ACCEPT, AND (B)
INDIA'S COMMITMENT TO BEING A NON-PROLIFERATION WHATEVER OTHER
STATES DO. HE SAID THE LATTER POSITION REPRESENTED BASIC,
LONG-STANDING NATIONAL POLICY ACCEPTED BY ALMOST ALL ELEMENTS
IN THE COUNTRY AND NOT ONLY HIS OWN CONVICTIONS. HE ADDED
THAT ALTHOUGH MRS. GANDHI'S DECISION TO TEST A NUCLEAR EX-
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PLOSIVE WAS "A GREAT MISTAKE", HE BELIEVED THAT IT WAS TAKEN
"FOR POLITICAL REASONS" AND DID NOT REPRESENT AN INTENT TO
DEVELOP NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND HENCE DID NOT CONSTITUTE A BREACH
OF THE BASIC NATIONAL POLICY.

3. EARLY IN THE DISCUSSION, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT
INDIA WOULD NOT ACCEPT FULL-SCOPE SAGEGUARDS UNTIL THE WEAPONS

STATES THEMSELVES DID. LATER, HOWEVER, HE SPELLED OUT THREE CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH INDIA MIGHT ACCEPT THEM: NAMELY, IF THE USSR AND USA AGREED (A) TO A TOTAL BAN ON NUCLEAR TESTING; (B) TO STOP THE PRODUCTION OF ADDITIONAL NUCLEAR WEAPONS; (C) PLEDGED THEMSELVES TO THE SUBSEQUENT REDUCTION AND EVENTUAL ELIMINATION OF THEIR NUCLEAR STOCKPILES. (COMMENT: NOTE THAT THE THIRD CONDITION HERE VARIES FROM THAT HE ENUNCIATED IN A PRESS INTERVIEW OF JANUARY 4, AS REPORTED IN REF-TEL, AND MAY CONCEIVABLY GIVE US SLIGHTLY MORE ELBOWROOM.) WHEN SENATOR STEVENS ASKED HIM IF HE WAS EXCLUDING CHINA WHEN HE STATED THESE CONDITIONS, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID YES, BECAUSE HE FELT CONFIDENT THAT IF THE USA AND USSR AGREED ON THIS COURSE, CHINA WOULD EVENTUALLY FOLLOW.

4. AT ANOTHER POINT, WHEN THE TALK WAS ABOUT TARAPUR, HE SAID INDIA WAS PREPARED TO SUFFER IF SUPPLY FROM THE US HAD TO BE CUT OFF UNDER OUR IMPENDING LEGISLATION. HE ADDED THAT INDIA WOULD "IMPROVISE" AND SEEMED TO SUGGEST THAT IN A FEW YEARS INDIA COULD MAKE UP THE DIFFERENCE ON ITS OWN. (IN A SEPARATE MEETING WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER EARLIER, VAJPAYEE HAD MADE TWO SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT POINTS: (A) THE SENATORS SHOULD UNDERSTAND THAT GOI HAS TO BE RESPONSIVE TO INDIAN PUBLIC OPINION ON THE SAFEGUARDS QUESTION, EVEN AS THEY THEMSELVES ARE IN THE LEGISLATION THEY ARE DEVELOPING AT HOME. (B) INDIA QUESTIONS THE PROPRIETY OF OUR NEW LEGISLATION BEING APPLIED RETROACTIVELY TO THE EXISTING US AGREEMENT TO SUPPLY TARALIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PUR. NEITHER POINT WAS PICKED UP BY THE SENATORS OR DEVELOPED FURTHER BY MINISTER VAJPAYEE.)

5. FINALLY, WHEN SENATOR HOLLINGS SOUGHT TO EMPHASIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF INDIA'S MORAL LEADERSHIP AS AN INFLUENCE ON OTHER NATIONS WITH NUCLEAR WEAPONS POTENTIAL TO ACCEPT IAEA SAFEGUARDS AND HOLD BACK ON REPROCESSING, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT INDIA'S DETERMINATION TO FOREGO NUCLEAR WEAPONS WAS, IN HIS VIEW, THE BEST INFLUENCE IT COULD EXERT. HE DESCRIBED IT AS A FORM OF SATYAGRAHA (GANDHIAN "SOUL-FORCE") AND DECLARED THAT THIS WAS THE ONLY KIND OF LEADERSHIP TO WHICH INDIA ASPIRED. IN CLOSING THE MEETING THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT HE ATTACHED MUCH IMPORTANCE TO THE SORT OF FREE AND CANDID DISCUSSION HE AND THE SENATORS HAD HAD; THAT A CONTINUED EXCHANGE OF VIEWS ON THESE ISSUES WAS DESIRABLE; AND THAT OUR DIFFERENCES IN THIS AREA SHOULD NOT BE ALLOWED TO STAND IN THE WAY OF GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN INDIA AND THE USA.
GOHEEN

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